

the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim October 21 through October 27, 2001, as National Character Counts Week. I call upon the people of the United States to commemorate this week with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-second day of October, in the year of our Lord two thousand one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-sixth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:37 a.m., October 29, 2001]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 23, and it will be published in the *Federal Register* on October 30.

Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives on Transfer of Funds in Response to Terrorist Attacks of September 11

October 22, 2001

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with provisions of Public Law 107–38, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Recovery from and Response to Terrorist Attacks on the United States, FY 2001, today I have authorized transfers from the Emergency Response Fund totaling \$1.7 billion for emergency recovery and response and national security activities listed in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. As provided in Public Law 107–38, \$1.6 billion of these funds will be made available to agencies 15 days from the date of this transmittal and \$71.4 million will be made available to the Department of Defense immediately.

These funds are in addition to the \$7.2 billion that I previously authorized for transfer and will allow our Government to continue to address the consequences—both at home and abroad—arising from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

On October 17th, I asked the Congress to provide \$20 billion in emergency funding for both defense and domestic needs related to the September attacks. I urge the Congress to enact these crucial resources without delay. The details of these actions are set forth in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. I concur with his comments and observations.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 23. The Office of the Press Secretary also made available the text of Office of Management and Budget Director Mitch Daniels' letter. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

October 23, 2001

The President. It's been my honor to brief key Members of the Senate and the House on our trip to the Far East. It was a very successful trip, in that we were able to have an honest dialog about the need to fight terror.

And the 21 nations—20 other nations represented there agreed with our country, and they appreciate our determination to fight and win the war against terror. They understand that an attack on America could have been an attack on them. And the cooperation was very strong and very evident, and I am most grateful.

And I am most grateful for the opportunity to share with the Members of the House and the Senate this essential—and I want to, first, thank Chairman Biden and Chairman Hyde and the other Members here for standing solidly with the administration to formulate and conduct a foreign policy that's in the best interest of our country.

It is oftentimes said that when it comes to foreign policy, partisanship stops, and that's exactly what has happened here at this table. I've had a lot of discussions with both

Chairmen up to now, and I will continue having discussions with the leaders of the House and the Senate, because whether you're Republican or Democrat, we all want to win this war.

I'd be glad to answer a couple of questions.

Anthrax at the White House Complex

Q. Sir, is the White House under attack now—the latest anthrax case?

The President. Well, there is no question that evildoers are continuing to try to harm America and Americans. Today, at a remote facility, we detected some anthrax. And just like at the Congress, our Government is responding very quickly.

We're working hard to find out who is doing this and bring them to justice. We're also working to develop measures necessary to protect American citizens and postal workers. All of us around this table grieve when we hear the fact that a citizen has lost a life. Two postal workers passed away, and our hearts are with their families. Our prayers are with their loved ones. And the evil ones continue.

Q. Is there any way, sir, that whatever contaminated that machine, whether it be a letter or a package, got into the West Wing? Or has all mail been cut off to prevent that from happening?

The President. Ron [Ron Fournier, Associated Press], we're making sure that the West Wing, the White House is safe. Let me put it this way: I'm confident, when I come to work tomorrow, that I'll be safe.

U.S. Response to Anthrax

Q. Mr. President, have you or the Vice President been tested for anthrax? And what is your sense of this latest development, sir? For the most part, these attacks have been aimed at prominent people and prominent places. Is it your sense that the real purpose here is to sow fear and confusion in the American public?

The President. First of all, I don't have anthrax. It's hard for Americans to imagine how evil the people are who are doing this. We're having to adjust our thinking. We're a kind nation. We're a compassionate nation. We're a nation of strong values, and we value life. And we're learning people in this world

want to terrorize our country by trying to take life.

They won't succeed. This country is too strong to allow terrorists to affect the lives of our citizens. I understand people are concerned, and they should be. But they need to know our Government is doing everything we possibly can to protect the lives of our citizens—everything. We're waging an aggressive campaign overseas to bring Al Qaida to justice.

Today I've—in working with the Postmaster General—got our OMB to allocate \$175 million for immediate relief, immediate safety at post offices around the country. This is what he requested; he thinks this is what is necessary to assure the post office employees that they will be as safe as possible. And we're going to spend that money.

Our health care workers are working around the clock to help people in need, and I will tell you that I think not only are they doing a good job; I think they probably saved a lot of lives by their quick action. And I'm proud of how quickly and how hard they're working.

The object of terrorism is to try to force us to change our way of life, is to force us to retreat, is to force us to be what we're not. And that's—they're going to fail. They're simply going to fail. I want to assure my fellow Americans that our determination—I say "our;" I'm talking about Republicans and Democrats here in Washington—has never been stronger to succeed in bringing terrorists to justice, protecting our homeland, because what we do today will affect our children and grandchildren. This is our calling. This is the time for us to act in a bold way, and we are doing just that.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, are you now operating on the assumption that the September 11th attacks and the anthrax attacks, anthrax letters, are linked? And if I may shift gears for a second and ask about your meeting with Foreign Minister Peres. Would an Israeli failure to withdraw from the Palestinian areas make it harder to keep Arab states in the international antiterrorism—

The President. Well, I told Shimon Peres that, first of all, our country and the people

of our country are saddened by the fact that a Cabinet Minister was assassinated. It's just unacceptable behavior. I also told him that we continue to call upon Chairman Arafat to do everything he can to bring the killer to justice. It's very important that he arrest the person who did this, or those who did this act, and continue to arrest those who would disrupt and harm Israeli citizens. He must—he must show the resolve necessary to bring peace to the region.

And finally, I did express our concern about troops in Palestinian territory, and I would hope the Israelis would move their troops as quickly as possible.

Q. Did you get any satisfaction?

The President. Well, he's a very thoughtful man. He's a friend, a friend of America's, and I listened very carefully.

Your first question was?

Linkage of Terrorist Acts

Q. The link between September 11th and—

The President. Well, we don't have any hard evidence. But there's no question that anybody who would mail anthrax with the attempt to harm American citizens is a terrorist. And there's no question that Al Qaida is a terrorist organization. So it wouldn't put it past me that there—you know, it wouldn't surprise me that they're involved with it. But I have no direct evidence.

I do know that this country is strong enough to endure, to endure the evil ones. And we're making great progress on the ground in Afghanistan, and we'll bring the Al Qaida to justice, and we'll—we're doing everything we can to find out who mailed these letters.

Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

President's Health

Q. Mr. President, have you been tested for anthrax?

The President. I don't have anthrax.

Q. So you've been tested, sir?

The President. I don't have it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 4:48 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel and Chairman Yasser

Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on Northern Ireland

October 23, 2001

I warmly welcome the announcement by the Chairman of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, General John de Chastelain, that a significant act of decommissioning has been carried out by the IRA and verified by the Commission. This is an historic step by the IRA. The people of Northern Ireland are now measurably closer to the lasting peace which they richly deserve.

I hope all paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland will build on today's events, striving to achieve the total disarmament called for by the Good Friday agreement. I know I speak for all Americans when I express my heartfelt appreciation to General de Chastelain for his continuing efforts in support of the peace process. This act of decommissioning will, I hope, lead to the full functioning of the political institutions of the Good Friday agreement. All leaders should be prepared to intensify their efforts to resolve remaining outstanding issues.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report of the Railroad Retirement Board

October 23, 2001

To the Congress of the United States:

I transmit herewith the Annual Report of the Railroad Retirement Board for Fiscal Year 2000, pursuant to the provisions of section 7(b)(6) of the Railroad Retirement Act and section 12(1) of the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act.

George W. Bush

The White House,
October 23, 2001.